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ABSTRACT

In addition to providing important factual information, these guidelines are designed to encourage, facilitate, and help improve the academic study of religion(s) in public primary and secondary schools in Wisconsin within Constitutional bounds. The guidelines may also be used by educators in other states. A basic rationale for religious studies in public schools is first presented. A basic rationale is that religion has been a major influence in human affairs, and that the academic study of religion(s) is, thus, essential to a complete education. The legal basis and requirements of public education religious studies in Wisconsin are examined. The remainder of the guidelines focus on the curriculum and other particular aspects of teaching about religion in the context of the legal boundaries, the rationale, and goals. For example, the best way to include religion in the curriculum is discussed; guidelines for inclusion are presented; special units and separate courses are discussed; and standards for teacher certification in religious studies are presented. The guidelines conclude with a selected list of printed sources, references, and guides. (RM)

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RELIGIOUS STUDIES GUIDELINES

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"IN ADDITION, IT MIGHT WELL BE SAID THAT ONE'S EDUCATION IS NOT COMPLETE WITHOUT THE STUDY OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION OR THE HISTORY OF RELIGION AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF CIVILIZATION. IT CERTAINLY MAY BE SAID THAT THE BIBLE IS WORTHY OF STUDY FOR ITS LITERARY AND HISTORICAL QUALITIES. NOTHING WE HAVE SAID HERE INDICATES THAT SUCH STUDY OF THE BIBLE OR OF RELIGION, WHEN PRESENTED OBJECTIVELY AS PART OF A SECULAR PROGRAM OF EDUCATION, MAY NOT BE EFFECTED CONSISTENT WITH THE FIRST AMENDMENT."

Justice Tom Clark
Abington v. Schempp-Murray
June 17, 1963

"NEITHER THE STATE NOR THIS COURT CAN OR SHOULD IGNORE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FACT THAT A VAST PORTION OF OUR PEOPLE BELIEVE IN AND WORSHIP GOD AND THAT MANY OF OUR LEGAL, POLITICAL, AND PERSONAL VALUES DERIVE HISTORICALLY FROM RELIGIOUS TEACHINGS."

Justice Arthur Goldberg
Abington v. Schempp-Murray
June, 17, 1963

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FOREWORD

Although careful attention must be given to the restrictions of the Constitution in the matter of indoctrination and religious neutrality, the schools surely cannot fulfill adequately their educational functions without including instruction concerning the impact of religion upon people, cultures, political systems, and world history.

If the public schools are truly to educate for responsible citizenship, that is, to prepare young people for wise decision-making within the freedom of a democratic society, they certainly cannot ignore the influence of religious values in forming democratic institutions and in shaping contemporary society. The survival of a democracy depends on a well-informed, voting public who understand the different moral and ethical values that must be confronted in the political processes.

If public schools are also to develop individual skills for productive and meaningful participation in a society that is pluralistic by nature, they must help students understand the diversity of beliefs and practices that are present and precious in our world. One cannot be helpful, compassionate, or wise in relationships with other people or other societies if there is no knowledge of the motives, beliefs, and values held by others. Even if a local community is presently homogeneous, the schools have an obligation to educate young people in the realities of the larger community of the state, nation, and world. Given the mobility of the society and the influence of mass media, children have a right to be prepared for the future challenges life will undoubtedly bring to them.

Given the above, these "Guidelines" are presented to help educators become aware of issues, information, and curriculum possibilities relative to the academic study of religion.

Herbert J. Grover
State Superintendent

PREFACE

These guidelines have been issued by the Department of Public Instruction as part of its continuing commitment to the academic study about religion in public schools and to comprehensive public education in the state of Wisconsin.

In 1973, Wisconsin became one of the first states to adopt formal certification standards for teachers of religious studies in public schools. By the end of 1977, there were twelve Wisconsin colleges and universities with teacher education programs in religious studies certified by the Department of Public Instruction. Meanwhile, the Subcommittee on Religious Studies of the State Social Studies Curriculum Commitee was formed to assist in long-range planning and to address some of the more immediate needs of religious studies education in the state. The guidelines are one of the results of the Subcommittee's work to date.

Although the Subcommittee is responsible for the actual drafting and the content of the guidelines, a wide spectrum of participation and support has been sought from in-service teachers, school officials, college and university specialists, representatives of various religious and secular groups, and other individuals and organizations in and outside of Wisconsin.

I wish to thank all of those who have contributed to this undertaking. All of us are especially grateful to the Public Education Religion Studies Center (PERSC) at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio. We also would like to acknowledge our debt to several other organizations whose activities and written materials have been of considerable help to the Subcommittee. These include: The Florida State University Religion-Social Studies Curriculum Project; The World Religious Curriculum Development Project at St. Louis Park, Minnesota; the Moral Guidelines Implementation Committee of the State of California; The Minnesota Guidelines Steering Committee; The Council on the Study of Religion in Michigan Schools; and, the Wisconsin Council of Churches.

The guidelines are dedicated to everyone who has worked to advance religious studies education in Wisconsin and to establish a proper place for the academic study of religion in public schools in our state.

H. Michael Hartoonian
Supervisor of Social Studies Education

INTRODUCTION

Religion, by almost any definition, touches the core of human commitments and concerns. In the United States and many other countries, religion also involves matters of basic human freedoms and rights. For these and other reasons, the study of religion in American public schools should always be approached with particular sensitivity and care.

There is longstanding and still growing recognition among educators and the general public in America that religion, like government, economics, or the arts, has been a major influence in human affairs and that the academic study of religion(s) is, thus, essential to a complete education. Both the legitimacy and the importance of such study also is acknowledged by the United States Supreme Court which has repeatedly confirmed the legal basis and strengthened the educational rationale for religion study in public schools within the limits of the First Amendment principles of religious freedom and separation of church and state.

By both scholarly and Constitutional definition, the academic study of religion denotes an open, objective, non-sectarian, and pluralistic study <u>about</u> religion, including its content, its variety, development, and relationship to other areas of human activity.

In addition to providing important factual information, these guidelines are designed to encourage, facilitate, and help improve the academic study of religion(s) in public primary and secondary schools in Wisconsin within Constitutional bounds.

The legal aspects of public school religion study, important as they are, should be approached primarily from the perspective of the essential academic and educational purposes of such study. Therefore, the guidelines give special attention to the basic rationale, goals, and curricular implications of public school religion study, as well as to the pertinent legal/constitutional questions.

Religion involves an extremely wide spectrum of human values, institutions, and relationships; and no attempt is made here to provide any preferred or arbitrary definition of "religion" for use in Wisconsin public schools. Several general definitions, however, are included or implied in the main body of the guidelines. Those references will suffice to indicate currently acceptable academic and legal definitions of religion and to facilitate recognition and avoidance of definitions that are either excessively narrow or overly broad and ambiguous.

Nor has the State Social Studies Committee attempted to resolve the question of whether or not academic religion study should be considered a distinct discipline in public schools. Whatever the views on that issue, it is essential to recognize that public school religion study requires, and should be judged and defined, by the same basic standards of <u>academic</u> competence, responsibility, and integrity required of any other discipline or field of study in the curriculum.

The guidelines are addressed primarily to teachers, to school officials, and to all others directly involved in the development and implementation of curriculum in local school districts in Wisconsin. They also are designed for use by college teachers and students involved in programs in elementary and secondary education, as well as for state and local officials and the interested general public. In addition, they might be useful to many of the growing number of private schools in Wisconsin that recognize the basic applicability and value of public education religion study to their own curriculum.

A word of caution is in order regarding the interpretation and use of these guidelines by local school districts. It must be emphasized that they are not intended to be a blueprint that is equally applicable to all places and situations in the state. In matters of law, they are necessarily as specific and comprehensive as possible. In matters of subject content and approach, they are intentionally flexible and suggestive. Consequently, it will be necessary for local districts to review them carefully and to adopt them to local circumstances and needs. By the same token, close attention should be paid to the specific legal requirements and ethical responsibilities considered in this document.

BASIC RATIONALE FOR RELIGIOUS STUDIES IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

It is worth repeating here that the legal aspects of public education religious studies, important as they are, should not be allowed to overshadow the more fundamental educational concerns of such study. Among the most important of these concerns are basic rationale.

A clear concept of basic rationale is essential to the development and effectiveness of any religious studies program in public schools. Because religion is a serious and sensitive matter to many people, it is especially important that teachers, administrators, and others in the community who wish to introduce religious studies into the curriculum know why it belongs there. This will help to avoid misunderstandings and will increase the probability of acquiring and retaining adequate community and/or official support.

Is there one primary reason why religious studies should be in the public schools curriculum? - These guidelines already have referred several times to what is the key reason why religious studies belong in the curriculum; namely, because an education that excludes or gives inadequate attention to such studies is incomplete.

Reflecting this view, Justice Clark and other members of the U.S. Supreme Court have expressed a conviction shared by growing numbers of educators, public officials, and citizens at large in the United States. The American Council of Education, for example, issued a similar statement in 1947 -- sixteen years before the pivotal Supreme Court ruling in Schempp-Murray. In a major statement on public education religious studies published in 1964, the American Council of School Administrators put the matter this way:

> "A curriculum which ignored religion would itself have serious religious implications. It would seem to proclaim that religion has not been as real in men's lives as health, politics or economics. By omission, it would appear to deny that religion has been and is important in man's history--a denial of the obvious. As an integral part of man's culture, it must be included."

and, as the Public Education Religion Studies Center (PERSC) staff pointed out in 1974:

> "Also, in a time like ours when societal values are changing ... it is important to study about the sources of values. Religion is a source of values for many people and societies. Therefore, it is important for the public school to help students understand the role of religion in value formation and value conservation and transformation."

There are, of course, other important reasons for studying religion(s). The following three guideline statements are an attempt to provide a comprehensive, yet concise, synthesis of basic rationale developed over the last three decades by educators, the Court, Public Education Religion Studies Center (PERSC), and other individuals and organizations.

Guideline I

Religion is a universal human phenomenon and a significant factor in nearly all areas of human activity and thought. Study of religion(s) and the religious factor thus is essential to adequate understanding of:

a. human HISTORY and the role of religion in the lives of all peoples;

b. human CULTURE(s) and its various components (literature, art, music, social and economic life, politics, language, religion itself, etc.);

c. human VALUES in their individual and collective manifestations; and

d. human BEHAVIOR in its individual and collective manifestations.

Guideline II

The academic study of religion(s) is an integral part of the humanizing potential of education. As such, it can contribute to the student's development of a mature sense of:

a. self-worth and the worth of others;

b. human individuality and human community; and

c. human diversity and our common humanity.

Guideline III

The academic study of religion(s) can contribute to the student's preparation for responsible participation in the community and the larger society by helping her or him to:

a. develop a sense of critical (i.e., discerning and informed) judgment;

b. become aware of contemporary issues and the deeper-seated factors and forces that conserve, disturb, and change society;

c. appreciate the need for both order and dissent in society; and

d. acquire respect for our human differences and dispel stereotypes that foster religious and other forms of prejudice and discrimination.

While it is important that the Supreme Court has given sanction and support to public education religious studies, their essential validity does not rest solely, or even primarily, on the Court's approval. Therefore, it is recommended here that the approval of the Court not

be put forth as the essential rationale. Among other things, it suggests an uncritical ordering of priorities and evokes unnecessary legalism; both of which can have adverse effects on community and school support for religious studies in the public schools.

It also is best to avoid claims of "moral improvement" or "moral uplift" as a major rationale for academic religious studies. The presumption that such studies will lead students to "ultimate meaning" or "real purpose" in life also should be avoided. Morality, meaning, and purpose certainly are, important aspects of religious concern, and no one can teach meaningfully about most religions at any grade level without dealing with these kinds of values. There is no assurance, however, that a student who knows more about religion(s) will behave more ethically or have a better personal sense of meaning and purpose that any other citizen--although some students certainly may--as a result of exposure to the academic study of religion(s). Thus, it seems unwise, at best, to attempt to justify religious studies primarily as an effort to improve private or public morality or to provide students with "deeper" personal meaning and purpose in life. Such a tact, especially if pursued too avidly in the classroom, could be quite misleading and potentially in conflict with the constitutional injunctions against indoctrination and the fostering of religion in public schools.

In summary, the primary purpose of public education religious studies is educational and academic. Education is not sufficiently comprehensive nor complete without adequate consideration of religion and its past and present role in the life of all people(s). While such study also can make important contributions to the personal growth and social awareness of students, it should not be justified or conducted primarily on such grounds as legal authority, moral improvement, or discovery of life's ultimate meaning and purpose. In other words, the study of religion, as the study of science or history or mathematics, is an important part of our cultural heritage and as such should be included in the education of the enlightened citizen.

THE LEGAL BASIS AND REQUIREMENTS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION RELIGIOUS STUDIES IN WISCONSIN

Teachers, administrators, school boards, and local citizens involved or interested in religious studies in the public school should be aware of the essential constitutional bases, requirements, and boundaries of such studies.

What is the primary legal basis of religious studies in public schools? It is necessary to begin with this question because much confusion and misunderstanding persists--within as well as outside of public education in America--regarding the legal status of religious studies in public schools. The answer lies first and foremost in the United States Constitution, or, more precisely, in its interpretation over the years by the United States Supreme Court.

Reference to key passages in the 1963 Supreme Court ruling in Abington v. Schempp and Murray v. Curlett, which focused on state-sponsored

prayer recitations and Bible reading in public schools, indicate that the "wall of separation" (between church and state) erected in the First Amendment does not, contrary to some popular opinion, prohibit the academic study of religion(s) in public schools. This was clearly stated by Justice Tom Clark in the majority opinion in Schempp-Murray, part of which is quoted on the inside front page of these guidelines. While the Court ruled prayer recitations and Bible readings unconstitutional when conducted for sectarian purposes or as part of a state-sponsored practice of religion, it did not ban the study of the Bible nor other academic study of religion..."when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education..." In the same ruling, Justice Brennan concurred with Justice Clark when he wrote:

> "The holding of the Court today plainly does not foreclose teaching about the Holy Scriptures or about the differences between religious sects in classes in literature or history to teach meaningfully about many subjects in the social sciences or the humanities without some mention of religion."

In his concurring opinion, Justice Goldberg added:

> ..."It is said, and I agree, that the attitude of the state toward religion must be one of neutrality. But untutored devotion to the concept of neutrality can lead to the invocation or approval of results which partake not simply of that noninterference and noninvolvement which the Constitution commands, but of a brooding and pervasive devotion to the secular and a passive, or even active, hostility to the religious. Such results are not only not compelled by the Constitution, but, it seems to me, are prohibited by it... Government must inevitably take cognizance of this existence of religion and indeed, under certain circumstances, the First Amendment may require that it do so. And it seems clear to me from the opinions in present and past cases that the Court would recognize the propriety of... the teaching about religions, as distinguished from the teaching of religions, in the public schools."

The ruling in Schempp-Murray also set forth the view that the academic study of religion(s) not only can but should be included in the public school curriculum. This view is amplified by the words of Justice Jackson, who wrote over a decade earlier:

> ..."but it would not seem practical to teach either practice or appreciation of the arts if we are to forbid exposure of youth to any religious influences. Music without sacred music, architecture without the cathedral, or painting without the scriptural themes would be eccentric and incomplete, even from a secular point of view... One can hardly respect the system of education that would leave the student wholly ignorant of the currents of religious thought that move the world society for a part in which he is being prepared." (McCollum v. Board of Education, 1948).

The academic study of religion(s) in public schools, then is constitutional and, in the eyes of the U. S. Supreme Court, also desirable on the grounds that an education that excludes such study is incomplete. Justice Goldberg went even further by suggesting in Schempp-Murray that the exclusion of such study cannot be excused in the name of neutrality and may even be, in some circumstances, contrary to the First Amendment.

What are the legal requirements and limits of religious studies in public schools? - This question addresses the constitutional requirements and boundaries of the actual conduct of religious studies in public schools. It asks, in other words, how has the Court defined academic religious studies and religion as applied to public schools. James V. Panoch (in the PERSC Guidebook, p. 2) has provided a useful distillation of the Supreme Court's dicta on the requirements of academic religious studies in public schools since Schempp-Murray:

> "The school may sponsor the study of religion, but may not sponsor the practice of religion.
>
> The school may expose students to all religious views, but may not impose any particular view.
>
> The school's approach to religion is one of instruction, not of indoctrination.
>
> The function of the school is to educate about all religions, not to convert to any one religion.
>
> The school's approach to religion is academic, not devotional.
>
> The school should study what all people believe, but should not teach a pupil what he should believe.
>
> The school should strive for student awareness of all religions, but should not press for student acceptance of any one religion.
>
> The school should seek to inform the student about various beliefs, but should not seek to conform him to any one belief."

Although Panoch's summary tends to yield distinctions that in practice are often more subtle, it helps to clarify the basic differences between the proper academic (i.e., legal) approach and the sectarian and doctrinal (i.e., unconstitutional) approach to religion in the public schools. It also helps to isolate three key guiding concepts of the Court regarding the basic legal responsibility of public schools in the area of religious studies. These three concepts are:

1. NEUTRALITY: not in the sense of exclusion of religious studies from the curriculum, but in the sense that the school must remain neutral, or impartial regarding either the advancement or the inhibition of any religion(s) or unreligion(s) in teaching about religion(s);

2. OBJECTIVITY: not in the absolute sense, which the court recognized as impossible, but in the sense of the school's obligation to teach about religion(s) for purposes of academic instruction as opposed to teaching of religion(s) for purposes of sectarian or ideological indoctrination, conversion, or conformity;

3. PLURALISTIC APPROACH: not in the sense that all religions must be given equal emphasis and time, but in the sense of the school's responsibility to expose students academically to the variety of religious beliefs and traditions in the United States and throughout the world.

It should be noted in regard to the pluralistic concept that the Court has not necessarily limited the content of religious studies in public schools to those areas and approaches specifically mentioned in the Schempp-Murray and McCollum rulings cited earlier (i.e., world religions, religious aspects of culture, sacred writings for literary and historical study, etc.). This is evidenced by the case of Torcaso v. Watkins (1961) in which the Supreme Court said, in part:

> "Neither a State nor the Federal Government can constitutionally...aid those religions based on belief in the existence in God as against those religions founded on a different belief...Among religions in this country which do not reach what would generally be considered a belief in the existence of God are Buddhism, Taoism, Ethical Culture, Secular Humanism, and others."

The Torcaso ruling enlarged the legal definition considerably beyond the theocentric definition of religion formerly dominant in American legal circles and public schools by including non-theistic faiths and value systems. By linking the Torcaso decision to principles previously applied in education cases (e.g., McCollum and Everson v. Board of Education, 1947), the Court also extended the applicability of its broad definition of religion to public education. This did not, of course, signal the nullification or abandonment by the Court of the traditional theistic definition of religion. In effect, it has given the schools two basic definitions of religion to work with: the narrower traditional one, and the broader perception given in Torcaso.

Thus, in terms of legal requirements and boundaries, the school is within the law when it teaches about religion(s) as part of an objective and impartial program of academic study that seeks neither to promote nor to inhibit religion in general or any particular religion or nonreligion and which refrains from the sectarian practice of religion. The school also has wide latitude regarding the content of such study beyond the narrower, theistic definition of religion.

What is the legal view of the State of Wisconsin toward religious studies in public schools? - American State and lower Federal Courts have said relatively little about the issues considered here. There is nothing in the Wisconsin State Constitution, however, that prohibits academic religious studies in our public schools. The Wisconsin Supreme Court has, in fact, taken essentially the same position as the

U.S. Supreme Court by declaring in 1969 that:... "the constitutions were not intended to prohibit the academic study of religion" (State ex rel. Warren v. Reuter).

What Is Legal And What Is Not? The following statements summarize the main points of the preceding survey of basic legal questions and add several specific items of importance to public schools drawn from PERSC, the Minnesota Guidelines Steering Committee, and other sources. This is not a definitive list, but it can serve as a useful basic legal guide for religious studies in and other matters pertaining to religion and public schools in Wisconsin.

What Can be Done

1. Public schools can teach about religion(s) within the constitutional requirements of neutrality, objectivity, and a pluralistic approach. In this light students can:

   a. recite such documents as the Declaration of Independence, which contain references to God;

   b. sing the National Anthem and other patriotic songs which contain assertions of faith to God;

   c. make references to faith in God in connection with patriotic or ceremonial occasions are permissible;

   d. dismissed for sectarian instruction off school premises; and

   e. use school facilities (rented during off hours to religious organizations) if there is a general policy of renting facilities to non-school organizations.

2. The pluralistic content of such study may include, but may not be limited to:

   a. religions of the world's peoples;

   b. religious themes and influences in the arts and other areas of human cultures;

   c. sacred writings, including the Bible, as subjects of literary or historial study;

   d. differences between religious sects where appropriate to the study of literature, history, or other areas of human activity, including religion itself;

   e. the contributions of religion to culture in the context of study of the social studies and humanities;

   f. history of religions and comparative study of religions and religious phenomena; and

g. non-theistic faiths and value systems, as well as those religions that are based on belief in the existence of God.

What Cannot Be Done

1. School may not use compulsory attendance laws to impose religious worship or instruction on children.

2. The school program may not provide for compulsory reading from the Bible as part of a religious service.

3. Schools may not require students to recite prayers even though those requesting it may be excused.

4. Schools may not espouse a "religion of secularism"--or atheistic philosophy--any more than a theistic religion.

5. Government officials may not compose or sanction official prayers for recitation in the schools.

6. Sectarian instruction may not be offered in schools during school hours.

7. Sectarian literature, including Bibles and religious tracts, may not be distributed in the schools.

GENERAL GOALS FOR RELIGIOUS STUDIES IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

What is the primary goal of public education religious studies? - From the previous discussion of rationale, it should be clear that the chief goal, or goals, of religious studies in public schools must be educational and academic. Robert A. Spivey and Rodney F. Allen of Florida State University have defined this primary aim as "religious literacy." Nicholas Piediscalzi, the Co-Director of PERSC, has used the phrase "critical understanding" to designate the essential goal of academic religious studies. Both of these concepts involve and incorporate three essential elements: (1) intelligent understanding of religion(s) and its place in human affairs; (2) intelligent appreciation, or sensitive awareness, of human worth and and the human condition; and (3) functional intellectual skills, especially the basic methods, or tools, of critical thinking. All three of these elements are directly relevant to the aims of comprehensive or general education.

Religious literacy and critical understanding, whichever one prefers, are both valid ways of stating the primary goals of religious studies in public schools. For a more comprehensive and specific definition of general goals, it would be difficult to improve upon those already developed by Piediscalzi and by Spivey and Allen within the respective conceptual frameworks outlined above. Although they are in essential agreement, it is worth including the goal statements of both Piediscalzi and the Florida State University Religion-Social Studies Curriculum Project as our recommended guidelines for general religious studies goals. Other goals pertaining more narrowly to particular aspects of religious studies education in Wisconsin are suggested in later sections of this document.

Nicholas Piediscalzi suggests that public education religious studies... "should seek to develop a broad and discerning understanding of:

* The religious dimension of human existence and the many and diverse ways in which it is embodied and expressed in human histories, cultures and lives;

* How religions influence cultures and institutions and in turn are influenced by them;

* The meaning and significance of making a religious commitment either through acculturation, nurture or conversion, and living by it;

* The interaction of religion and morality and the distinction between the two;

* The history of religions in America and the interaction of religions and culture in America in addition to the conflicts between religions and between religions and culture in America;

* The numerous and different ways in which religions may be studied;

* The difference between practicing a religion and studying about religions;

* The religious crossroad at which American students stand; and

* The mysteriousness of religion."

These nine basic goals are complemented by the somewhat more detailed statement of the Florida State University Religion-Social Studies Curriculum Project staff within the context of "religious literacy." They suggest that the general goals for public school religious studies should include:

I. An understanding of:

A. The nature of religion...
* its essential characteristics;
* its development, organization, and transmission; and
* its universality and variety.

B. The place (or role) of religion...
* its cultural context;
* its relation to economic, social, political, educational, and domestic institutions; and
* its relations to man's humanistic endeavors: art, music, language, literature, etc.

C. The methods of study in religion...
* the variety of ways of inquiry; and
* the legitimacy of the study of religion, and the distinction between study of and adherence to religion.

II. An appreciation of:

A. The place of religion in human history

B. The role of religion in private motivations, habits, and aspirations

C. The varieties of religious expressions, understandings, and effects

D. The necessity for mutual tolerance

III. Development of skills in:

A. Perceptive application of the processes of inquiry to religious concepts

B. Intelligent development of moral reasoning and value judgment

C. Careful description of religious phenomena

D. Fair-minded explanations of religious practices and beliefs

E. Reasoned analysis of differences and similarities among religions

F. Responsible evaluation of religion's function in both individual and cultural contexts

The above examples of "goals for religious studies" should be carefully considered by educators. However, goals should be derived from and consistent with the general educational purposes of the school district. As with other academic areas of study, the goals of religious studies should be compatible with the philosophy of the school and community.

NATURAL INCLUSION OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES IN THE CURRICULUM

The remainder of the guidelines focus on the curriculum and other particular aspects of teaching about religion(s) in the context of the legal boundaries, the rationale, and the goals previously considered. This section and the one immediately following deal with the closely related questions of where, when, and how religious studies can be included in the public school curriculum.

What is the best way to include religion in the curriculum? The most obvious answers to this question are special units and/or separate courses of religious studies. While units and separate courses certainly are legitimate and often very effective ways to proceed, experience in Wisconsin and elsewhere in the United States strongly indicates that the easiest and generally the most effective way to include religious studies in the public primary and secondary schools is by integration of such studies wherever it naturally arises and belongs in the subject matter of other courses and programs in the regular curriculum. This is called natural inclusion. This is especially valid when the school is consciously introducing religious studies content for the first time or when just the elementary curriculum is involved. As the staff of PERSC has pointed out, natural inclusion with other subjects fulfills three basic objectives:

> "First, content is presented in a more complete and academically honest manner. Second, it enables students to develop an awareness and understanding of religion--its impact on man, its values, its problems, and its content. And, thirdly, it achieves these objectives without a disproportionate and undue emphasis on religion." (PERSC Guidebook, p. 9)

It should be added that natural inclusion also fulfills another major objective of religious studies by bringing a maximum number of students into direct contact with the academic study of religion(s) with minimal curricular modification or expense. The following brief survey will serve to illustrate these basic points.

History courses--(be they American history, state or local history, the European or Western traditions, or histories of Non-Western peoples and societies)--are probably the easiest and most obvious places for the natural inclusion of religious studies content in the secondary curriculum. The relationship of religion to the American Constitution and political system, the role of religion in shaping social and economic values and institutions, the relationship of religion to social stability and change, and the influences of religion on individual human behavior are just a few of the other many places and ways that religious studies can be included naturally in the social studies curriculum of the secondary school.

The humanities provide equally ample scope for the natural inclusion of religious studies in secondary schools. The religious motif in Western and American literature, for example, is not limited to the Bible and other sacred writings. It also appears in different forms and degrees in much of classical and modern literature from early

Egyptian wisdom writings and the works of the ancient Greek dramatists and philosophers to Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Emerson, Thoreau, A. Huxley, and Tennessee Williams. The visual arts provide some of the richest sources of religious expression and influence among peoples the world over and in all ages, including our modern age (e.g. some of the paintings of George Rouault, Paul Klee, Salvador Dali, Vincent Van Gogh, and Pablo Picasso). The religious factor also can be found and studied in connection with the performing arts throughout the world, especially music and various forms of theatrical presentations (e.g., passion plays, devotional drama of India, kabuki theater of Japan, etc.).

The world of modern mass media and popular cultures is literally alive with religious implications and themes. The proliferation of religious and pseudo-religious sects, cults, and revival movements across the United States in recent years is just one of many tangible indications of this fact. It is also visible, for example, in many best sellers (e.g., The Fixer, Lord of the Flies, Johnny Got His Gun, Go Tell It on the Mountain, The Invisible Man, Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee, and, Siddhartha); in films (e.g., "Love Story," "Quo Vadis," "Ben Hur," "The Pawn Broker," "Man for All Seasons," "The Seventh Seal," "My God," etc.); and popular recordings (e.g., Let It Be, Stairway to Heaven; Dust in the Wind, You Light Up My Life,, My Lord/Hare Krishna, the music from Godspell, Jesus Christ Superstar, and the civil rights movement of the 1960's, etc.). Newspapers, magazines and even cartoons (e.g., Peanuts) and graffiti ("Jesus Saves," "Buddha Lives," "Love is all," etc.) also convey serious expressions of religious symbolism and concerns which can help students to recognize and better understand the religious dimension of modern life.

The study of technology is a place where interaction with religious studies content is important. Students can raise important moral and religious questions concerning the uses and consequences of scientific knowledge. This can and often does include a wide range of issues from atomic and biological weapons to energy, transplants, chemical food additives, pesticides, defoliants, and birth control. In like manner, discussion of the responses of various religious communities to scientific conceptions of human, organic, and inorganic evolution can arise in general science study, as well as in courses in biology, geology or astronomy, but when this takes place the teacher (or a teaching team) should be sensitive to the moral/ religious as well as the scientific connotations of the issue. That is, teachers should understand the nature, sources, and approaches of both discipline areas, and be clear relative to the basic differences in the epistemological bases of religion and science. There is no recognizable confrontation of one discipline with the other and knowledge of one cannot diminish knowledge of the other.

The natural inclusion of religious studies is just as appropriate (and, perhaps, even more important) in the elementary grades, when children are forming their initial basic perceptions of themselves, society, and the world. Family, community, and regional studies in the elementary curriculum provide almost unlimited opportunity for such inclusion, especially in the cross-cultural and multi-cultural

context of the contemporary world. Study of a culturally diverse community like Milwaukee, for example, would not be complete without attention to the role of religion and religious groups in an urban setting. There is nothing to prevent elementary school teachers from introducing their students to the rich native-American, Afro-American, and European religious heritages in Wisconsin by including it naturally wherever and whenever it belongs in studies of our state. Study of the United States and other countries and cultures, of course, offer equally ample opportunities for natural integration of religious studies materials in the elementary curriculum.

The language arts (especially children's stories, verbal and reading exercises, and word games) is another area of the elementary curriculum where religious studies can be effectively included in a natural way. For many children, the arts (domestic, as well as visual and performing) often prove to be the most natural and enjoyable way of exploring and beginning to appreciate the religious aspects of human culture. The elementary curriculum also is a legitimate place to introduce some of the main ethical and religious implications of science and environmental studies provided, of course, that the approach is academically and legally valid and appropriate to the age levels of development of the students involved.

Incomplete as it is, the foregoing survey should give a good indication of the wide range of possibilities open for integration of religious studies into the regular curriculum both of primary and secondary schools through natural inclusion. Most teachers should be able to expand on our examples and suggestions in different ways on the basis of their own particular training, experience and interests. However, it should be noted further that teachers with little or no preparation in the subject matter of religious studies should attempt to develop the proper competencies, preferably through some form of formal training, before trying to integrate any substantial amounts of such subject matter into their regular courses. On the other hand, the need for specialized training is obviously not as great for natural inclusion as it is for teaching special units and separate courses of religious studies.

Guideline Regarding Natural Inclusion. The basic guideline concepts and suggestions in this section can now be summarized as follows:

1. "Natural inclusion" normally is the simplest and most effective way to include religious studies in the curriculum of public elementary and secondary school.

    a. It is appropriate in nearly all subject areas of the regular curriculum, including science and environmental studies.

    b. It provides the greatest opportunity to present religious studies content to a maximum number of students in historical, cultural and personal context.

    c. It does so without complete or exaggerated stress on religion.

d. It also does so with little or no curriculum changes or additional expense to the school.

e. It applies equally as well to the elementary curriculum as it does to the curriculum of the secondary school.

f. It requires less specialized training in religious studies than special units and separate courses of religious studies. In many cases (e.g., the lower elementary curriculum) broad, general exposure to religious studies is preferable to specialized teacher training.

g. It usually is the best way for most schools to build an adequate foundation for special units and courses and a more comprehensive overall program of religious studies.

h. It is usually more likely to gain immediate and general community support.

SPECIAL UNITS AND COURSES OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

The special emphasis given to natural inclusion should not be interpreted as an effort to minimize either the validity or the importance of the other two basic ways that religious studies can be included in the curriculum of public schools, namely, special units and separate courses.

Special Units - Special units on religion and related subjects can be integrated into existing courses in the regular curriculum almost as easily and often as natural inclusion of religious studies content. Such units, in fact, have become increasingly more common and effective in recent years as more and better materials have become available. This is especially true at the secondary level, where units on religion have been included in many courses in history, literature, cross-cultural studies, and other areas of the social studies and humanities curriculum. The available list of such units actually being taught in American high schools today is much too lengthy to include here in its entirety. The following short listing, however, provides some idea of the scope of titles and subject matter of units most often used in secondary schools in Wisconsin and elsewhere in the United States:

Comparative Religions
World Religions
Asian Religions
Western Religions
Religions of Bibical Tradition
The Bible as Literature
Sociology of Religion
Western Religious Thought
Great Ideas in Religion
Religion and Contemporary Values
Religion in American History
Religion in Modern America

This does not include various units on individual religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, etc.) and other basic value systems. In short, the titles and content of these special units range widely from disciplinary approaches (Comparative Religions and Sociology of Religion) and regional-cultural subject matter (Asian Religions and Western Religions) to the Bible as/in literature and the study of values.

Although special units of religious studies have been less common in the pre-junior high grades, their inclusion in the elementary curriculum also has been increasing in the last few years. Many teachers have developed mini-units of their own on various religions and aspects of religion based on some of the new materials that have become available for elementary use. Others are starting to use the full multimedia units and unit series now available for elementary schools. A good example of the latter is the series of related units of cross-cultural community studies recently developed by the Florida State Religion-Social Studies Curriculum Project. Designed mainly for lower elementary use, these units explore religion and its role in three different cultural settings through a combination of readings, videocassettes, tapes and student projects. The first unit focuses on the

prehistoric Mound Builders of central Georgia, U.S.A., in the context of a homogeneous religious and cultural community. The second unit deals with religious and cultural diversity by exploring Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam in present-day Java. The third unit presents the concept of a national religious tradition, with emphasis on Thanksgiving and other "national" religious holidays in English-speaking North America. The students complete the series by gathering information on their own communities in connection with the unit themes.

One notable advantage of some special units besides their greater concentration of religious studies content is their adaptability to more than one course or field of study. Thus, a carefully prepared and flexible unit on religion and contemporary values might fit equally well into separate regular courses in modern history, modern literature, and values study. By the same token, a unit on Hinduism or Islam, for example, with some minor modifications, perhaps, could be included in an Asian history course, a cross-cultural course on the Afro-Asian world, a geography course, or a sociology course at the high school level. Some special units also are relatively easy to expand or shorten to meet particular curriculum contingencies and needs with little or no sacrifice of basic quality.

Separate Course - Although they are mostly inappropriate for the elementary curriculum, separate religious studies courses, like special units on religion, have become more common in secondary schools in various parts of the United States. Many of these full-semester or one-year courses are outgrowths or expanded versions of special units and/or natural inclusion content from other courses. Most others have been developed independently, often in lieu of any existing religious studies content in the regular curriculum. The list of religious studies courses offered in high schools in Wisconsin as of March 1978 is generally typical of the range and content of religious studies courses offered in other states. It includes:

Comparative World Religions
World Religions
Religion in Society
The Bible as Literature
Literature of the Bible
Mythology and the Bible
Shakespeare and the Bible

The predominance of courses on world religions and the Bible in/as literature is not unusual given the emphasis of available materials and teacher training programs in religious studies and related fields for secondary schools. Considering the potential scope that these courses provide, the subject matter is not nearly as circumscribed as it might first appear. The problem here is not so much a limitation of subject matter as it is that schools tend to be unwilling or un able to offer such courses on a permanent basis.

The obvious advantage of a separate course is the opportunity that it gives interested students to explore the content and role of religion or a major aspect of one or more religions at some depth over an extended period of time. The existence of one or more such courses

also reflects the school's commitment to complete education, as well as its acknowledgement that the academic study of religion(s) deserves a place in the regular curriculum on a par with other academic subjects.

There are, however, several real and potential, though certainly not unsurmountable, difficulties associated with separate religious studies courses in secondary schools. PERSC has stated the gist of the problem quite well:

> "The major problem with special courses (and to a lesser extent with the special unit) is that it is likely to get the individual teacher in deeper than he (or she) is prepared for. Special courses often require a broader and deeper knowledge of material than many teachers are trained to provide. The risk of inadequate training in content areas and of unintentional bias on the part of such teachers has been a source of serious concern to both scholars and religious leaders. Their concern should not be taken lightly." (PERSC Guidebook, p. 10)

Although more materials and training opportunities have become available since PERSC first sounded this note of caution in 1974, the basic problem that it addresses still exists and should not be ignored. Careful thought also should be given to the wisdom of introducing separate religious studies courses without a prior foundation of natural inclusion content and/or special units on religion in the regular curriculum. While such a course, or courses, may be, in some cases, better than having no religious studies at all, relatively few students may benefit from this approach. This is to say that the separate course in and of itself may not be the best way for the school to meet its obligation to provide students with the opportunity for a complete education--even when trained teachers and adequate religious studies materials are available. On the other hand, there is no reason why separate religious studies courses should not be offered as electives where adequate materials and guidance exist and where there also is some broadly based natural inclusion content and/or special units on religion in the regular curriculum.

The optimum situation, of course, is a balanced combination of all three basic approaches to including religious studies in the curriculum --natural inclusion, special units, and separate courses--or, a combination of natural inclusion and either units or one or more courses. Several schools in Wisconsin already are providing such comprehensive programs of religious studies. Many, if not most, schools simply are not equipped or prepared to implement a more complete program of this kind all at once, however, and most districts would be well advised to proceed more modestly with natural inclusion and special units until such time as there is demonstrated need, opportunity and resources for the introduction of a separate religious studies course or courses.

Guideline Regarding Special Units and Courses. To state in summary guideline form the main things to consider about the inclusion of special units and separate courses of religious studies in the public school curriculum, the following points should be considered:

1. Special units are the most common and workable way after natural inclusion of including religious studies in the regular curriculum.

2. At the secondary level, and to a lesser extent in the elementary curriculum, opportunities for including such units are almost as abundant as natural inclusion.

3. Some special units have the added advantage of flexible applicability to more than one regular course or program and to varying curriculum circumstances and needs (considerations of time, space, content emphases, etc.).

4. Separate courses in religious studies, although inappropriate to most elementary programs, are becoming more feasible and common in the secondary school curriculum.

5. Separate courses provide interested high school students with a chance to study religion(s) and its influences in some depth in a proper academic context.

6. The existence of such a course or courses displays and reinforces the school's commitment to complete education and to the value of religious studies as a major area of academic inquiry.

7. Because religious studies still does not have full disciplinary status as a public school subject and because such study has some unique legal and emotional connotations in this country, such courses should be offered only as electives.

8. The risks of superficiality, distortion, and unintentional bias--as well as the status of religious studies in the curriculum at large--should be carefully considered before introducing separate courses.

STANDARDS FOR TEACHER CERTIFICATION IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Standard I - The program will provide prospective teachers with knowledge of the major religious traditions of the human family.

Standard II - The program will provide prospective teachers with an understanding of the role of religion in contemporary society.

Standard III - The program will provide prospective teachers with an understanding of the relationships between religion and other human institutions.

Standard IV - The program will provide prospective teachers with an understanding of the legal basis and requirements of teaching religious studies in Wisconsin public schools.

The following colleges and universities offer approved teacher education programs in religious studies:

University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire
University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point
University of Wisconsin-Whitewater
Alverno College
Cardinal Stritch College
Edgewood College
Lawrence University
Marquette University
Mt. Mary College
St. Norbert College
Viterbo College

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